

# Bristol arena: no public money needed, YTL

News

22 November 2018



**THE NEW** frontrunner among the three contenders to build an arena in Bristol has told LIVE UK it expects to open its 16,000-capacity venue in the north of the city by 2022, and will need no public money.

Malaysia-based family-owned YTL, named after founder Yeoh Tiong Lay, rejects widely quoted claims (see LIVE UK, issue 224) that it required local authorities to invest £100m in public transport and infrastructure around the north Bristol site, saying it hopes instead for a £5m-£10m public contribution towards those costs.

The company acquired the 354-acre Filton airfield in 2015 with plans to build a new city district around the two-mile runway where both Concorde and the giant 1950s airliner the Bristol Brabazon were developed.

According to YTL Arena Bristol MD Andrew Billingham, the company told Bristol mayor Marvin Rees it would go ahead with Filton if he decided the rival 12,000-capacity Arena Island project, adjacent to the city centre's Temple Meads railway station, was not a good use of public money.

As LIVE UK reported in September, Rees cancelled the central arena plan – to be managed by SMG and Live Nation Entertainment – but then faced a third bid from promoter Harvey Goldsmith and Bristol entrepreneur Stephen Fear, backed by US venue operator Oak View Group. The latter also favoured a city centre development.

Billingham describes the Oak View plan as “hypothetical” and says, “I would expect lots of competition, but Bristol just wants someone to deliver and we have the superstructure ready to go.”

In YTL's plan, the arena would be part of a £80m-£100m privately-funded development including 7,000 homes and a new railway station, Brabazon Central, alongside the venue.

It would be operated by YTL itself using its own ticketing system, although Billingham is exploring partnerships with companies such as AEG, the NEC Group and Ticketmaster, as well as sponsorships at various levels. However, he says no naming rights deal is planned.

“We're looking at multiple brand partnerships across the venue, including experience partnerships, local service providers and global partnerships,” says Billingham, who joined YTL after a career in sports and events, including being CEO of Bristol Sport when he expanded Bristol City's Ashton Gate Stadium from an 18,000 to 27,000-seat venue.

He expects 60 per cent of the arena's entertainment to be live music.

“The Temple Meads to Brabazon [rail link] is already programmed, the Metrobus West extension is funded, so with the M32, M4 and M5 within 10 minutes, we're in a great location already,” he says. “But opening the two-mile freight railway from Bristol Parkway to Brabazon Central [to passengers] would really put Bristol on the map.

“Early feasibilities suggest that will cost £5m-£10m.”

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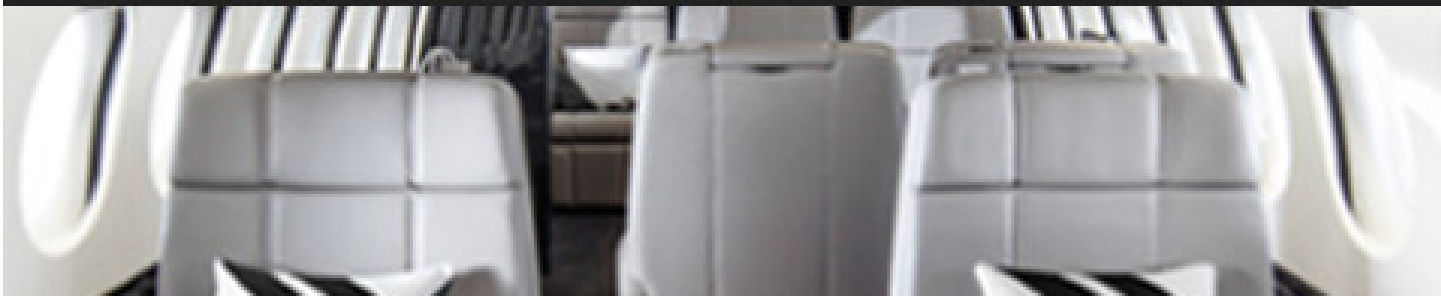
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